



S.B. No 17 AN ACT CONCERNING WELLNESS PROGRAMS AND EXPANSION OF HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE

Good Morning Senator Crisco, Representative Megna and Committee Members,

I am Dr. Nancy Bruno, a clinical doctor of Audiology. I am currently employed as the manager of audiology at Connecticut Children's Medical Center. In addition, I serve as the Vice President of Governmental Affairs for the Connecticut Academy of Audiology. I have had the privilege of providing audiological services to Connecticut residents for over 25 years. Audiologists are health-care professionals who evaluate, diagnose, treat, and manage hearing loss and balance disorders in adults and children. Audiological treatment of hearing loss includes the prescription and fitting of hearing aids. I am here today to speak in support of SB17. This act would expand our current Connecticut statute mandating that health insurance policies provide coverage for hearing aids for children age 12 and younger, to include all children up to the age of 18.

Hearing loss has been shown to negatively impact almost every area of people's lives including: earning potential, school performance, health (physical, emotional and mental), social skills, family relationships, and self-esteem (Reference: Better Hearing Institute). Treatment that includes hearing aids can benefit the overwhelming majority of people with hearing loss, (90 to 95%) through potentially significant decreases in the negative impacts of hearing loss on school and work performance. Yet, only 23% of Americans with hearing loss report using hearing aids. Why? The most common reason is limited financial resources. A 2007 study by the National Center for Hearing Assessment and Management found 22% of families who did not obtain hearing aids for their children did so because they could not afford to purchase them.

Connecticut families with children of all ages can receive support for purchase of hearing aids if they meet eligibility requirements for Husky A, Husky Plus or Title V (CT Lifespan Respite Coalition). Ability of families with employer provided insurance to purchase hearing aids for their children is partially supported by Connecticut statutes mandating that health insurance policies provide coverage for hearing aids for children age 12 and under. Support in purchasing hearing aids is lacking for families with children age 13 through 18 years of age, typically those enrolled in middle school and high school. Of the states which currently have mandates relating to insurance coverage for hearing aids for children, only Connecticut's statutes fails to address coverage for teenagers. Support of S.B. 17 with its changes to expand coverage for hearing aids to age 18, provides an opportunity to make a lifelong positive impact for Connecticut's hearing impaired teenagers and their families decreasing the need for potentially costly educational support services and increasing potential earnings through improved access to hearing aids.

The potential benefit in expanding coverage for hearing aids under state statute from children age 12 and under to all children is clear. I would point out that the cost of expanding coverage as measured by anticipated increase in numbers of children to whom coverage would apply is minimal. Estimates based on incidence of hearing loss in school age children (Reference: 4 to

5/1,000 NIDCD Outcomes Research in Children with Hearing Loss December 2006 statistics on hearing loss) and 2007 Connecticut Census data support an estimate of 3,236 to 4,046 school age children with significant hearing loss. Hearing aids for children have a useful life expectancy of 3 to 5 years. Given the preceding 200 to 250 hearing impaired children between the ages of 13 and 18 may seek new hearing aids annually. Only a percentage would be covered by employer provided insurance subject to state statutes.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today on this important issue. If I can be of assistance in providing additional information on hearing loss or hearing aids, please feel free to contact me. Thank you for your time.

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